THE OGDEN STANDARD

WHERE UNCLE SAM IS HEAD OF THE FAMILY

UNIQUE Administration of the Pribilof Islands, Where Natives Depend Upon Him Even for Food and for Protection Against Japanese Seal Poachers.

Their Names Are Very Musical—Nadesda Orlof, Alexander Melovidoff, Marcia and Margaret Melovidoff and Nicolai Orlof. The Revenue Cutters Set Their Fashion in Dress.

WINTER sealskins worn by the woman of fashion amid the gayety and luxury of metropolitan life are obtained largely from the barren and desolate Pribilof Islands, sometimes called the Fur Seal Islands, which lie off the Alaskan coast, in the Behring Sea, in latitude 56 degrees 50 minutes north and longitude 170 degrees west. There are only four of the islands large enough to be habitable—St. Paul, St. George, Otter and Seal islands. Joan Snyd first sighted them in 1767, and in 1786 seals were discovered there by Gerassim Pribilof, a Russian. The United States acquired them with the purchase of Alaska and leases them to the North American Commercial Company. Although the islands have been the subject of international disputes over sealing rights, the life of the natives and government of the group, which are described in the following story, are known to very few Americans.

OUR government's dealings with some of its people are remarkably intimate. There are official reports which will show, for instance, not only when young Alexander Rooknavishnikoff was born, but how long he went to school and when he had the mumps. It is of public record that Agrifina Bogadanof has $161.10 in the bank, and somewhere else is told how Porfiri Pankoff got drunk. On another page one learns the local price of potatoes and onions, ginghams and bedspreads, trousers, tobacco, pocket knives, soap, shoes, and nearly anything else the family may need, as well as the sum of the paterfamilias' wages during the year.

This domestic information is to be found in reports of the government representative in a remote bit of the United States, where the government is not only owner and manager of all industry, but personal guardian of the people in the establishment. It is somewhat as if the Pullman Company, owning the land and houses of the town of Pullman, exercised legal jurisdiction over its residents, the Pullman employes, and guardianship of their temporal welfare besides. The little villages of St. Paul and St. George are the scene of the American fur seal industry, and this industry is a government monopoly. So peculiar are all the conditions surrounding it that its administration not only becomes a precedent in public policy with respect to natural resources but involves a curious human problem which entails other exceptional procedure. Nowhere in the world, probably, is just the counterpart of this diminutive domain.

About three hundred persons live on the Pribilof Islands, or rather on two of those five little bits of volcanic land, named respectively St. Paul and St. George Islands, but more commonly known as the Seal Islands. It was the pursuit of fur seals that led Pribilof, of a Russian trading vessel, into these undiscovered regions away back in 1786. It was because he must have laborers to help him kill and cure the skins of the seals from the new found rookeries that there came to be human inhabitants upon these desolate shores. All through the two hundred and twenty-four years since then the people of the Pribilof Islands have been merely an adjunct of the seal industry. Thus it is not remarkable that except to the government's representatives who are actively engaged with the affairs of the islands the "natives" appear but as part of the landscape.

This little handful of people has, however, a pathetically interesting history—pathetic because they are such an incident in the great world's life and are so completely the victims of circumstance. Two centuries ago most of the islands of the Alaskan coast were inhabited by the Aleuts, hardy hunters and fishermen of primitive but independent race. Then came the Russian explorers, who turned the skill of these simple people to their own profit. From Unalaska and Atka Pribilof gathered the little colony for his previously uninhabited islands, and when the United States acquired Alaska this isolated little group of Aleuts was living in virtual slavery.

The first step of American administration was to lease the sealing rights and provide for the future of the natives, who were made wards of the government, much like the Indians. But they were provided a compulsory occupation, the lessee being required to employ them at a specified wage. Of its own accord the lessee, the Alaska Commercial Company then, replaced with neat frame dwellings the native half-underground, sod roofed barrabaras, in which the Aleuts had depended for warmth upon crowding together and burning the ill smelling and stifling seal blubber.

Their filthy and unsanitary condition was further improved by the United States government, which provided staple foods in addition to the seal meat diet, gave them wood and coal to burn, furnished physicians and medicines, schools where English rudiments are taught, and churches of the island faith, the Russian Greek of the former masters. The beneficiaries of these measures continue to look back regretfully to their Russian days, after the manner of subject peoples. But the treatment they have experienced under American dominion has in a sense almost killed them with kindness.

Pavla Stepetin

Agnes Stepetin

St. Paul Island "Creoles"

The isolation and barrenness of the Pribilof Islands make the natives peculiarly helpless. The seals have long been the one local food resource, except birds and bird eggs from the cliffs. There is not a tree on the islands, and the climate permits scant vegetation of any sort. The waters are practically empty of fish. The walrus and sea otter long ago disappeared, and the few foxes are insufficient for clothing, even were not they, like the seals, withheld from the natives' use. The necessaries of life must be brought to the islands from elsewhere or there would be famine and want. Thus, though the government had provided a wage giving occupation, the earnings would be useless with nothing to buy. So a store had to be established, maintained first by the lessee, but now by the government itself, since the seal rights are no longer leased.

Credited with Their Wages.

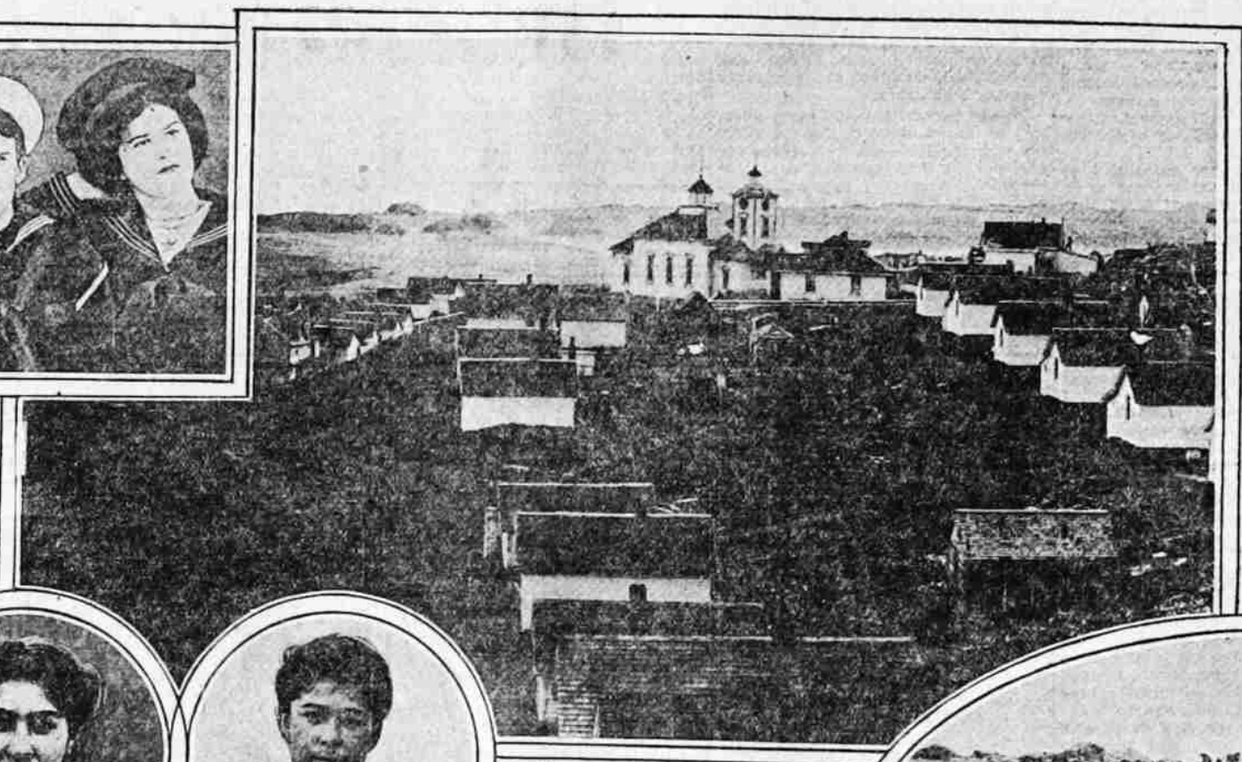
But the simple Aleut islander was naturally no master at business, and to insure his welfare a system of control was adopted for the expenditure of his earnings. At forty cents a sealskin the native communities earned $40,000 a year, $133 per caput, which with their simple needs afforded a margin of savings. They were not paid in cash for their labor, but credited with the sum, which was to be drawn upon in the form of supplies from the store.

For the first twenty years the support of the Pribilof natives presented no serious problem. They are a faithful, obedient and industrious race, skilled and swift in their accustomed work. They are tractable and kind in disposition, and, though slower of head than of hand, they responded gratifyingly to the civilizing influences about them. The chief adverse factor was the long dark winter of idleness, for the seal work lasts through the summer only.

The seals, however, under the devastating slaughter of the pelagic hunters, were growing fewer and fewer in numbers. The second lessee, the North American Commercial Company, when it took over its privileges in 1890 was soon limited to 60,000 instead of 100,000 sealskins a year. An increase to fifty cents a skin for the native laborer left him still with a loss, and soon the calamitous limit of 15,000 skins was decreed, for the herd was disappearing fast. The natives were now paid $1 a skin, but their mere $15,000 a year left them facing starvation. There was nothing for it, apparently, but to supply the deficiency outright.

This Congress did in a yearly appropriation of $19,500. The arrangement continued for years, leaving the native no margin of funds and no voice in his own expenditures. His feeble self-reliance disappeared, he became childlike in his dependence. He has worked just as faithfully as ever, be it recorded to his credit, which not many men would do for no more pay than if they did nothing. That is what the condition amounted to. When a man's earnings were gone, exhausted in orders for supplies, the supplies were continued as before out of a fund furnished by the government. There was no incentive for the industrious man to do more than his idle neighbor, and none had to think for himself.

But here, of course, is the problem. For two hundred years confined to one occupation, the Aleut cannot leave his island and take chances elsewhere for a livelihood; he lacks the initiative to do so if he could. Yet there are not enough seals to afford him a living wage by any natural standard. The government has, however, so disposed its appropriation that there is no longer frankly an alms fund, but the money available will be apportioned in the form of wages raised in accordance with needs. The rate of pay, that is, instead of $1 a sealskin, will depend upon the number of seal-



St. Paul Village. The Government House Is in Front of the Church

Bird Eggs Collected from the Cliffs and Laid Out in Piles Apportioned to the Native Families

external protection as well as internal order.

Their posts seem hardly inviting. The life lacks many material comforts, and means banishment from one's kind. St. Paul and St. George Islands are two hundred miles from any other land and are themselves forty miles apart. This year wireless telegraph equipment was installed, but heretofore for six or seven months of every year they have been cut off from all the world as well as from each other, and even in summer the only communication was by means of the

THE SURVEYOR AND THE CUB BEAR.

A SURVEYOR in a Western State captured a bear cub after a prolonged chase. He was walking quietly along when he saw the little bear not a dozen yards away. It seemed not the least afraid, and the man started toward it, expecting an easy capture; but when he was within a few feet of it it turned tail and scrambled up a chestnut tree, from the crotch of which it gazed down upon the man as if challenging him to catch it.

This increased the surveyor's desire to possess the cub. He threw off his coat and went up that tree. The youngster waited until he was close upon it, then walked out upon a limb. The man crawled cautiously after it, again thinking of an easy capture. But he was mistaken, for the cub, observing that he was coming too near for comfort, doubled itself into a ball and dropped to the ground. The man got to the ground in slower fashion. Meantime the cub had climbed another tree.

As the man regarded the cub, thoughtfully considering the situation, he finally came to the conclusion that the cub would pursue its former tactics. A happy idea came to the surveyor. He took from his pocket a tape line, made a slip noose in one end and placed it beneath the limb from which, as nearly as he could calculate, the cub would drop if it tumbled from the second tree as from the first. Keeping the box end of the line in his hand, the man climbed the tree.

The little bear waited until its pursuer had almost come upon it, and then walked out on a limb just as it had done before. The man cautiously followed and the cub walked nearly to the end, then dropped to the ground. As luck would have it the cub dropped outside the noose, but when he turned stepped inside with his forefeet. The man instantly drew the line, and there was the baby bear caught by its forelegs. It struggled and snarled, but only drew the slipknot tighter.

The man descended to the ground, holding the line taut. He had quite a tussle with the cub, but finally conquered, and the little fellow submitted to be taken away.

Breeding Seals

endless versatility of resource. If a house is to be built, the government's official representative is chief builder. If the launch has broken down, this is the man who repairs the engine. A telephone line is to be run, and here is the chief of the linemen. The artillery is to be mounted or the guard to be drilled, and here is the commanding officer. It is an isolated existence, to be sure. But one comes to realize that men and women who can meet its demands have that within them which can defy their isolation. For, yes, their wives go with them.

Danger from Japanese Poachers.

With the disappearance of the pelagic sealer the islands will henceforth have less need of their armament. Until now, however, the military responsibilities of the agents have been fraught with a real and serious personal danger as well as that of international complication. In a place so remote the whole population might be destroyed months before the world could know there was trouble. There is in winter a natural defence in the very ice that comes down from the north and cuts these islands off from the rest of the world. In summer they bravely set up their guns and drill their guards. The natives are an effective garrison, if a small one, for under training they have become very skilful riflemen, and likewise know their Gatlings and their Hotchkisses. Some of the seal rookeries have always been under watch during the summer, each watch house with a telephone line to the government headquarters.

The danger has been the Japanese poachers. The pelagic sealing schooners surrounded the islands, shooting the seals as they came out to sea in their search for food, and not seldom sending boats boldly within the three mile national limit. In the dense and constant fogs they could elude the revenue cutters which were on patrol, and their guns were often heard near shore when the boats could not be seen. Many necessarily escaped, but every season furnished its list of captured poachers, and in 1900 an apparently planned series of raids by the Japanese sealing fleet resulted in the capture of three or four landing parties on St. Paul Island.

The Island guards, with Mr. Lembkey and Mr. Judge, the government agents, in command, fortunately were not injured, but they killed no fewer than seven Japanese and captured a dozen of the party.

There are other adventurous experiences. There was a shipwreck on St. George Island—a vessel on its way from Nome with miners and their families. All hands from the islands turned out to help and the seventy persons were saved from the sinking ship. This meant seventy new mouths to feed out of limited stores, and men, women and babies to shelter for the next few weeks or more, until a cutter could take them to Juneau. But it was the last cutter of the season, and after the departure three men appeared in the village who had deliberately hidden back in the island to avoid being sent away.

They were typical mining camp outlaws, of the Dan Stark and Runyon style, guns, braggadocio and all. They coolly informed Dr. Chichester, the St. George agent, that they had chosen this place to spend the winter because they knew they could not be ejected and must be furnished food and shelter. And in fact they must. For such as these no existing lock-up would have been effective and they would in any case have to be fed. To forbid them the village was to court their depredations from without and constant trouble with the natives.

The same four men had been the government agents in charge of the Pribilof Islands for sixteen years or more, until last spring. For a year there had been a naturalist, besides, with, of course, at all times, the resident physician and school teachers. The entire establishment, formerly under the Treasury Department, was a few years ago transferred to the Bureau of Fisheries, in the Department of Commerce and Labor. The chief agent is Mr. Walter I. Lembkey; two assistants are Mr. James Judge and Major E. W. Clark.

Dr. H. D. Chichester and Dr. Walter H. Hahn, the other assistant agent and the naturalist, were victims of a tragic disaster last May, when both men and their wives, in a sailboat, were capsized in a squall. After an hour's struggle in the water, when rescue was at last accomplished, Dr. Chichester and Dr. Hahn died. This terrible news was awaiting Mr. Lembkey when he arrived at St. Paul aboard the first vessel of the summer, two weeks later, and he thence made it known by revenue cutter and wireless. Mrs. Chichester and Mrs. Hahn had gone to the islands the previous July as brides. Dr. Chichester had just taken his medical degree, and was voluntarily taking up the study of certain health problems of the natives on the islands, in addition to his work as agent. Dr. Hahn's observations as a biologist were expected to aid in many of the troublesome questions concerning the seal herd.

Styles for the Girls.

What the Aleuts are to-day in education and civilized attainment they owe largely to the government agents and the latters' wives, as well as to the teachers and the physicians that have been provided for them. It has been no prescribed duty of Mrs. Lembkey, Mrs. Judge and Mrs. Clark during all these years, nor of Mrs. Hahn and Mrs. Chichester during their briefer experience, to teach the native women household arts, but this they have all found their pleasure in doing.

The native girls are skilled in dressmaking and are clever imitators. The arrival of the ship with any of these women on board has meant the advent of new patterns and new dress goods, a special delight for the native girls which their white friends are glad to provide. The women of the islands do all the sewing, except the making of the grown men's clothes, and at gatherings for the purpose on the long, dark winter days the American women preside and direct.

The native men do the village work and shoot or gather eggs for the common store of food. Mr. Judge helped them to build a club house, and here they play billiards and other games the white men have taught them. Here, too, occur the dances, the favorite amusement of the natives.

The work—the men's work—of all sorts is done under orders of the agents through a first and second chief, elected by the natives themselves. These chiefs are held responsible, and they produce satisfactory service. The vice of the Aleut is drink, but the government forbids the landing of liquor on the islands. They have an intoxicant, however, a concoction of sugar and yeast, which they make for themselves. The agents restrict this indulgence by curtailing the sugar supply.

The Aleut is not cleanly by nature, though he has greatly improved in this respect. His houses, despite the white men's efforts, are not as sanitary and wholesome as they should be. This, with the weakness of deterioration during two centuries of abnormal environment, has brought these natives under the plague of tuberculosis, which causes half the deaths on the islands. The average life is but twenty-three years, and a man is old at forty. The oldest now living is fifty-nine.

Russianized in religion, and spending generously upon his church, the inhabitant of the Pribilof Islands is Russianized also in blood. Though the Aleut race is of Mongolian origin, its members on the Pribilof Islands do not relish their Japanese resemblance, for they hate the enemies of the Russians. And, in fact, many of them are almost white, with most Caucasian features. They are proud of the Russian admixture, and call themselves, because of it, "creoles." The more of a mixture the prouder, but every Aleut says he is a creole. They all bear Russian names, and they have selected from the aristocracy.

The government agents tell many a story of the natives' simplicity and their crudity of instinct and emotion. But they tell also of their kindliness, their generosity and their willingness to learn. And there is pathos in the incident of the man who came to the government house one night to say that his baby "he stop." The government house and "the boss" are the source of all things to the native, from the food he eats to instructions about his family. This time it was a little pine lumber that was wanted. And Dr. Chichester, passing the window an hour later, saw the man making his baby's coffin.

There is pathos, too, in the isolated condition of these people. How can they overcome their enormous handicap? To us it is somewhat consoling, but at the same time in one way more pitiful, to realize that they know none but this life. The freedom and hardy independence of generations past they cannot remember. The development to which their present civilization entitles them their circumscribed existence forbids. Perhaps some time, however, if present benevolent efforts succeed, the world will be opened to the Aleut by instruction in handcraft industries which will afford him a means of livelihood independent of the seals.

The difficulty is to find markets for his products with all other humanity hundreds of miles away. But trusting to accomplish this by some means, the agents are urging manual training schools for the younger generations. Four native boys, through Mr. Judge's efforts, have this year gone to an Indian school in Oregon.